

Wildlife Damage Management - Options for Producers

The DNR is responsible for managing Iowa's wildlife for all of Iowa's citizens. One of the Department's responsibilities is to provide private landowners with the guidance and assistance they need to effectively deal with wildlife damage.

Options for all producers

1. Technical advice on how to exclude or deter the animals causing damage.

A biologist can provide sources and advice on how to use fences, repellents or scare devices to keep animals from damaging the producer's crop.

2. Alternative horticulture or silviculture practices that will minimize or eliminate the damage.

A biologist can provide sources for materials and advice on how to use tree tubes or other practices to prevent deer from having easy access to young trees. These techniques allow the seedlings to grow above the level where damage occurs.

3. Recommendations to increase hunting pressure and take more antlerless deer within existing seasons and with existing hunters.

The producer and the hunters already hunting the property may be able to significantly reduce deer numbers by harvesting more antlerless deer. This is especially true if the current harvest is mainly bucks. In many counties hunters could use the antlerless licenses available in each county to increase the number of does taken during the seasons they already hunt.

Hunters on properties where deer damage is occurring should try to significantly increase the number of does killed and be selective on the type of bucks they kill. This philosophy is known as Quality Deer Management or QDM. Both hunters and landowners benefit when hunters practice QDM. Bucks are allowed to mature so the quality of the herd is improved yet there will be fewer does remaining to produce fawns the next year. Another option to increase the doe harvest would be to hunt during the November and January antlerless deer seasons if the producer's land is in one of the counties where licenses are available.

In some instance landowners may need to have frank discussions with their hunters to explain the need to kill more does if the hunter wants to continue to enjoy the privilege of hunting on the property. To quickly reduce deer numbers hunters should harvest at least 3 does for every buck they take. Landowners should insist that any hunter who wants to hunt help by taking additional does.

If the landowner does not currently have enough hunters to obtain an adequate harvest the DNR maintains a website of hunters willing to kill antlerless deer. A list of these hunters will be available to the landowner. It is up to the landowner however to contact hunters and the landowner always controls who has permission to hunt on their property.

Options for landowners with substantial damage

If a producer has one thousand dollars in damage or likely will sustain one thousand dollars in damage (Iowa Code 481C.2) they are eligible to obtain extra licenses or permits. There are two types of permits or licenses available:

- a. **depredation licenses** (for hunting deer within existing seasons)
- b. **shooting permits** (to kill deer outside of existing seasons).

To receive these licenses or permits the depredation biologist will first arrange to meet with the producer to assess the amount and type of damage occurring. If there is substantial damage due to deer, the biologist and producer will write a management plan. The plan specifies how many deer need to be killed and the number and type of permits that will be needed. The plan will also include recommendations on how regular hunting practices can be used to kill more antlerless deer and any other information that will help the producer reduce or prevent damage. At the end of the year the biologist will contact the producer to find out how many deer were taken during all of the seasons.

The biologist will review the plan annually and work with the landowner if more assistance is needed. The goal of the plan will be to reduce deer numbers in 3 years to the point that damage is less than one thousand dollars and that deer numbers can be controlled with normal hunting pressure.

What is the difference between depredation licenses and shooting permits?

1. Depredation licenses.

Depredation licenses are issued to individual hunters who have permission to hunt on the landowner's property. These licenses are issued for a specific season and will be valid for antlerless deer only. They cost the same as other antlerless deer licenses, \$12 each.

If the producer signs a depredation agreement they will receive a set of authorization numbers for their property. Each authorization number allows a hunter to purchase an antlerless license which will be valid on the producer's land. The depredation licenses may also be used on adjacent land if the adjacent landowner gives the hunter permission. Hunters may obtain up to three depredation licenses initially. If they harvest a deer they can obtain one additional license for each deer taken. They will need to get an authorization number from the producer for each additional license.

2. Shooting permits.

Shooting permits are issued to landowners or their designees in situations where substantial damage is occurring before a hunting season opens and action needs to be taken immediately. These permits are issued for a specific length of time and can only be used outside of the hunting season. These permits may be issued for either sex of deer depending upon the type of damage being done. Antlered deer may need to be killed to prevent damage even though this will not control the population. Producers will however be encouraged to use the shooting permits for antlerless deer. All deer killed must be recovered and the meat processed for consumption. The landowner or his designee may keep the meat or they can donate the deer to a HUSH locker. The producer should check with the locker to make arrangements to take deer outside of the hunting season. All antlers from deer taken using these permits will be turned over to a DNR officer and disposed of according to DNR rules. There is a \$2 fee (\$1 for HUSH and \$1 writing fee) for these permits.

Working with your neighbors.

It is essential to work cooperatively with your neighbors to keep deer populations at acceptable levels. The biologist can help landowners who are experiencing damage by working with adjacent landowners to increase the hunting pressure on adjacent land as well as on the landowner's land. The biologist and any landowners in the area willing to cooperate will create an area or "block" of land where deer numbers are above desired levels. Depredation licenses will be made available to other landowners and their hunters as well as to the producer experiencing the damage. These areas are called "block hunt" areas. Sometimes this is the most effective way to deal with damage experienced by landowners with crops next to good deer habitat. The landowner may experience substantial damage to their crops but since the deer spend the majority of their time on the adjacent property successfully reducing the damage will require cooperation with neighboring landowners.

Working together, landowners and the DNR can keep deer numbers at acceptable levels and have a deer herd that balances the needs of all of Iowa's citizens.